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ABSTRACT

The Nguzo Saba or "Seven Principles of Blackness" provide the fundamental basis for the development of an African America value system that is based on the cultural and historical particularisms of being Black in an American society that devalues Black efficacy and Black people. The fundamentals of this value system, foundational to the Kwanzaa life experience holiday celebration, are outlined as: (1) Umoja (unity), which is a commitment to the principle and practice of togetherness and collective action on critical levels (i.e., the family, community, nations, and races); (2) Kujichagulia (self-determination), which is a commitment to the principle and practice of defining, defending, and developing oneself instead of being defined, defended, and developed by others; (3) Ujima (collective work and responsibility), which is a commitment to active and informed togetherness in matters of common interest; (4) Ujamaa (cooperative economics), which is a commitment to the principles and practices of shared wealth and resources; (5) Nia (purpose), which is a commitment to the collective vocation of building, defending, and developing the national community in order to regain historical initiative and greatness as a people; (6) Kuumba (creativity), essentially a commitment to the principle and practice of positive proactive construction involving both aesthetic and material production and creativity, and commitment to African identity, both individually and collectively. Four reasons for placing emphasis on the African roots of the Kwanzaa life experience holiday situation, and a description of the Kwanzaa ritual conclude the paper. (LH)

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THE FUNDAMENTALS OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN VALUE SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

In his classic work entitled The Destruction of Black Civilization-Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C.-200 A.D., the former chairman of the history department at Howard University in Washington, D.C., Dr. Chancellor Williams makes a most profound statement that provides the intellectual parameters for our presentation at this Conference on the Humanities. Dr. Williams says that

> The tasks we now face will test the genius of the Black race. The Blacks in the United States are in the best position as a lead-off example for the rest of the African race. For such a movement would further change the course of history and inspire Black youth everywhere, along with their elders, with a new vision, a sense of direction, and the kind of outlook that gives meaning to study as the source of inventions and new discoveries. The challenge to the Blacks on this continent is to overcome the centuries of their own American version of tribalism and disunity. It is their greatest challenge in this era of perpetual crisis. They will accept it if they have come to understand at last that equal rights and equal justice will never come from appeals to the mighty, and granted as an Act of Grace, but only from their own position of power and influence which develop from a united people engaged in great and vast undertakings of their own. If we fail to accept this challenge at this critical turning point in our history, we will have proved ourselves unworthy of having any descendents, and our very names should be forgotten by them--or cursed by the farthest generation (Williams, pp. 381-382).

The task as defined by Williams is clearly reflective of a people, an African people, who have succumbed to the tenets of an alien value system developed, maintained and perpetuated by Caucasian people to insure perpetuity for themselves and their progeny. Thus the negronization of the kidnapped African beginning in the fifteenth century has in fact produced a "strange breed of homo sapiens" who have accepted the Greek Summum Bonum, that is the

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greatest good in life is to serve white people. The term negro itself is most appropriately defined as a person or people of African ancestry who believe in the inherent supremacy of Caucasian people and the inferiority of black people (Woodson, 1933).

The acceptance of a forced alien value system by the American negro was and continues to be perhaps the most henious remnant of the chattel experience of the African, even moreso than the brutalization of the physical being of the African. In fact, when a people knowingly betray themselves and future generations, the natural laws of self-preservation require that a new social die be cast, in order that the species continues to produce itself in harmony with the laws that govern the universe.

Clearly the need to cast a new social die is perhaps best facilitated through the process of throwing off the old shackles of self-hatred and self-deprecating attitudes and behaviours that are manifested results of centuries of involuntary and voluntary subscriptions by African people to alien values of Euro-American people for the past four hundred years.

The new social die for African Americans is based on the traditions and reasons of life in the West as seen through the cultural and historical legacies handed down through the ages by our ancestors from Mother Africa. The fundamental values of the new social die are called the Seven Principles of Nguzo Saba, the matrix of an African American value system that is celebrated during the Kwanzaa life experience holiday celebration.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF BLACKNESS (NGUZO SABA)

In order to begin to understand the underlying principles or values of Kwanzaa, Karenga gives a succinct overview of the evolution of Kwanzaa in relation to the Nguzo Saba:

> ...the core principles of Kwanzaa are the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles) which I developed and proposed during the Black Cultural Revolution of the Sixties as a necessary minimum set of principles by which Black people must live in order to begin to rescue and reconstruct our history and lives. The Nguzo Saba are thus, social principles, dealing with ways for us to relate to each other and rebuild our lives in our own image. And they require, not withdrawal, but confrontation with both ourselves and society. In fact, the Nguzo Saba and other principles of Kwanzaa require that we not only confront ourselves, but also overturn ourselves and begin to break the monopoly on our minds held by the negative and deforming values of the dominant society (Karenga, (2) pp. 14-15).

The Nguzo Saba or Seven Principles of Blackness provide the fundamental basis for the development of an "African American Value System" that is based on the cultural and historical particularisms of being black in an American society that devalues black efficacy and black peoplehood. Therefore, the definition of the term values (Gould and Kolb, p. 743)

> ...has come to denote the shared cultural standards according to which the relevance--moral, aesthetic, or cognitive--of the objects of attitudes, desires and needs can be compared and judged. There is the belief among those who share a set of standards that are valid and should be employed in valuing an object, i.e., comparing its relevance with that of another object or objects.

Clearly, this definition of the term values is particularly important as the need to establish a new set of values for African American people that are in contradistinction to the prevailing values of American society that are based on the dominant American value of white supremacy domination and control and black deprecation and subordination. In fact, the need for a black value system for African Americans exists, put in its simplest terms--because we do not have one.

For too long we African Americans have labored under the tenets of an American value system that not only has contributed to a shorter lie span, but has developed a blind adherence to a value system that systematically destroys our life chances and optimal living standards. Moreover, we have been willing accomplices or collaborators with a dehumanizing value system that sanctions and contributes to our own self-destruction because we have for too long chosen to ignore our history and African heritage. The African American sage Chancellor Williams elaborates further

> ...and we can determine what our heritage really is and, instead of just talking about 'identity,' we shall know at last precisely what purely African body of principles, value systems or philosophy of life--slowly evolved by our own forefathers over countless ages--from which we can develop an African ideology to guide us forward. In other words, there can be no real identity with our heritage until we know what our heritage really is. So we have been floating along, basking blissfully in the sunny heritage of other peoples. (Williams, p. 19.)

The values of Kwanzaa are based on our African origins and roots, and is designed to provide African American with renewed strength and meaning to our individual lives as we participate in the struggles for human dignity, justice, and equality for black people. "The Nguzo Saba are in fact, the matrix and minimum set of values by which black people must order their relations and live their lives, if they are to liberate themselves and begin to build a new world and a new people to inhabit it" (Karenga (2) p. 40).

The foundation for an African American value system is outlined by Dr. Karenga as he elaborates on the Seven Principles or Nguzo Saba: (1) The First Principle is Umoja (Unity) which is a commitment to the principle and practice of togetherness and collective action on crucial levels, i.e., building and maintaining unity in the family, community, nation and race. This is the first and foundational principle because without unity our possibilities as a people are few and fragile, if existent at all...Unity, thus, must

begin on the basic level of family and extend outward in expanding concentric circles of our national community. The lessons of who we are, our position and possibilities in life and the nature and need of building and maintaining quality and effective relations with each other are taught at an early age and in the context of the family. (2) The Second Principle is Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) which is a commitment to the principle and practice of defining, defending and developing ourselves instead of being defined, defended, and developed by others. It demands that we build our own lives in our own image and interests and construct, thru our own efforts, institutions that house our aspirations. Moreover, the principle of self-determination contains within it the fundamental assumption that we are our own liberators and that a people that cannot save itself is lost forever. (3) The Third Principle is Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) which is a commitment to active and informed togetherness on matters of common interest. It is also a recognition and respect of the fact that without collective work and struggle, progress is impossible and liberation unthinkable. Moreover, the principle of Ujima supports the fundamental assumption that Black is not just an identity, but also a destiny and duty, i.e., a responsibility. (4) The Fourth Principle is Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) which is essentually a commitment to the principle and practice of shared wealth and resources. It grows out of the fundamental African communal concept that the social wealth belongs to the masses of people who have created it and that no one should have such an unequal amount of wealth that it gives him/her the capacity to impose unequal, exploitative and oppressive relations on others. Ujamaa is another word for African socialism or communalism, a socio-economic system in which people come before profit and there is an egalitarian distribution of wealth, a planned economy and collective control of the means to satisfy human needs, i.e., control of the productive capacity of society. (5) The Fifth Principle is Nia (Purpose) which, in essence, is a commitment to the collective vocation of building, defending and developing our national community in order to regain our historical initiative and greatness as a people. At the core of this principle is the assumption and contention that the highest form of personal purpose that translates itself into a vocation and commitment which involves and benefits the masses of Black people..Correct and clearly defined purpose has its most definitive roots in a correct and clearly defined identity. To know who you are is, in fact, the sine qua non of a clearly defined purpose. Thus, positive and proactive purpose is best defined as active self-knowledge, knowledge of self which inspires action in defense and development of one's interests. (6) The Sixth Principle is Kuumba (Creativity) which essentially is a commitment to the principle and practice of building rather than destroying, of positive, proactive construction rather than negative reactive destruction... The principle of creativity involves both aesthetic and material production, writing poems as well as raising buildings to the sun, developing new forms of art and music as well as developing new medicines and new ways to win an old war for liberation and a higher level of human life. In a word, Creativity occurs and is

urged on all levels. For it is essentially the capacity to bring into being a new reality, whether in the partial or total sense, and thus add to the beauty, fullness and meaningfulness of life. (7) The Seventh Principle is Imani (Faith) which is essentially a profound belief in and commitment to ourselves as persons and a people and the righteousness and victory of our struggle. Moreover, it is belief in and commitment to our brothers and sisters, to their defense and development and to the fullness of our collective future. Inherent in the principle of Imani is the call for a humanistic faith, an earth-oriented, earth-based, people-centered faith in the tradition of the best of African philosophies and values. It is a principle that rejects all spookism, all mysticism and mystification and urges beliefs that benefit us as a people, not immobilize us for the benefit of the oppressor... The principle of Imani thus imposes on us responsibility to believe above all in our capacity and right to control our destiny and daily lives, to liberate ourselves and build a higher level of human life. In a word, it requires us to share reality in our own image and according to our own needs. For only thru such creative and proactive practice will we be able to believe in ourselves and know fully who we are in this world and in this universe (Karenga (3), pp. 40-45).

The core principles of Kwanzaa, the Seven Principles or Nguzo Saba privde the theoretical framework or paradigm from which the foundation for an African American value system (black value system) finds its genesis.

In preparation for participation in the Kwanzaa life experience holiday celebration, African Americans must subscribe to the tenets of the Nguzo Saba and develop a lifestyle that embodies these principles in their everyday lives. In essence, the acceptance and practice of the Seven Principles enables African Americans to understand that "...Kwanzaa is a life-experience, not simply a celebration. As a living social practice...a week of actual remembering, reassessment, recommitment, rewarding and rejoicing. For ourselves and history..." (Karenga (2), p. 20).

KWANZAA IS A LIFE EXPERIENCE HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

Americans as a people have always displayed a creative genius in their creation of holidays that specifically reflect their purpose as a national group. In addition, all American holidays identify their common ancestral roots in Western civilization.

During the holiday season that begins on Christmas day and culminates on New Year's Day, Americans of many ethnic, national and religious groups will celebrate either one or both holidays that are deeply rooted and grounded in the glories of Western tradition and culture (Young).

As an African American people in America, millions of black people across the U.S.A. celebrate a national "non-heroic" holiday called Kwanzaa that begins on December 26th and culminates on January 1st.

In 1966, Dr. Maulana Karanga displayed a creative genius in the creation of a national black holiday called Kwanzaa. The first Kwanzaa was celebrated December 26, 1966 through January 1, 1967 in Los Angeles by members and friends of Karenga's U.S. organization (Karenga (1)).

In creating the Kwanzaa holiday, Karenga not only understood that a holiday is a day on which custom or tradition dictates a cessation of non-essential business activity to commemorate or celebrate a particular religious or secular event. But more importantly, he understood that holidays in America specifically reflected the purpose of Americans as a national group with ancestral roots in the Greco-Roman traditions.

Reasons for Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is an African American life experience holiday celebration and commemoration which by its very definition reflects the dual character or existential duality of the cultural history of African American people. Dr. Karenga (3) cites four basic reasons for placing emphasis on the African roots of the holiday rather than on the historical roots of the African American experience that developed from the heinous "great kidnapping" of Africans from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries and the subsequent chattel experience from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries (Karenga (4)):

(1) First, we Afro-Americans are an African people and thus, our creations are African both in terms of our racial type and historical and cultural continuity. Therefore, Kwanzaa is essentially a product of the particular social conditions and self-determined needs of Afro-American people.

(2) Secondly, in the sixties the general thrust was to demonstrate and defend the historical and cultural unity of Africans on the continent and Africans in the diaspora. Thus, the intent and urgency was too narrow and deny the difference between continental and diasporan Africans, not to admit or critically expound on them.

(3) Thirdly, the concept of Kwanzaa as a holiday of the "first fruits" comes directly out of the tradition of agricultural peoples in Africa, who celebrated and gave thanks for harvests at designated times during the year. Although Afro-Americans are essentially an urban people and thus have no crops to harvest, the concept of "ingathering and celebration" formed a conceptual basis for Kwanzaa. Thus, Kwanzaa is a time for the gathering in of our people, celebration of ourselves and our achievements and rededication to greater achievements and fuller, more meaningful lives in the future. Moreover, the collective values, spirit and practices which pervade the Kwanzaa holiday, have their historical and cultural roots in Africa.

(4) A fourth reason for stressing the continental roots of Kwanzaa, rather than its Afro-American ones, was to facilitate its acceptance among the diversity of groups and persons who would eventually accept it. To stress its continental aspects rather than its Afro-American roots and content, was to take advantage of the "return to roots" thrust among Afro-Americans in establishing the legitimacy and needs of such a holiday (Karenga (3), pp. 12-13).

Clearly, the Pan-African American focus of Kwanzaa is designed to appeal to all black people who find themselves caught up in probably the most commercial Euro-American holiday, Christmas. Rather than seeking to become a "black Christmas", thus contributing to the crass buying and gift giving practices, "Kwanzaa seeks to establish and reinforce warm, meaningful, and authentic exchanges between parents and children and to counter the alienated and alienating practices of giving expensive gifts in substitute of ourselves. Thus, Kwanzaa

gift-giving resolves around and respects the fact that the gift is but an extension of ourselves and includes a vital part of us, i.e., our love and concern which the gift should exprss or it is meaningless--or worse a mockery" (Karenga (2), p. 37).

KWANZAA: TAMSHI LA TUTAONANA

In concluding this paper on the fundamentals of an African American value system that is foundational to the Kwanzaa life experience holiday celebration, the demands placed on African Americans during these eighties require that we give more than a passing or even academic notice to the validity and need for such, as we swiftly approach the eve of the twenty-first century.

The Kwanzaa ritual is carried out each day during the celebration of African Americans who have strived hard during the year to practice the Nguzo Saba as the "black value system." Therefore, during each day of Kwanzaa, they respond to the salutation "Habari Gani" (what's happening) by giving the name of the principle for that day. Each day the principles, in chronological order of the Nguzo Saba, are cited. One the 31st day of December, a reinforcing activity called the Karamu (feast) is held at night as is a very special occasion because it is a community and cooperative gathering that places emphasis on the growth and development of the children in regards to the progress of the group. The proactive bond between parents and children is cultivated to develop and maintain familyhood as the basis for peoplehood.

The Tamshi La Tutaonana, the farewell statement, gives perhaps the most concise statement of the spirit of Kwanzaa values and the fundamentals of an African American value system:

> Strive for discipline, dedication and achievement in all you do. Dare struggle and sacrifice and gain the strength that comes from this. Build where you are and dare leave a legacy that will last as long as the sun shines and the water flows. Practice daily Umoja, Kujichagulia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Khumba, and Imani. And may the wisdom of the ancestors always walk with us. May the year's end meet us laughing and stronger. May our children honor us by following our example in love and struggle. And at the end of this year, may we sit again together, in larger numbers, with greater achievement and closer to liberation and a higher level of human life (Karenga (2), p. 55).

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